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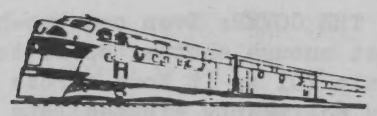

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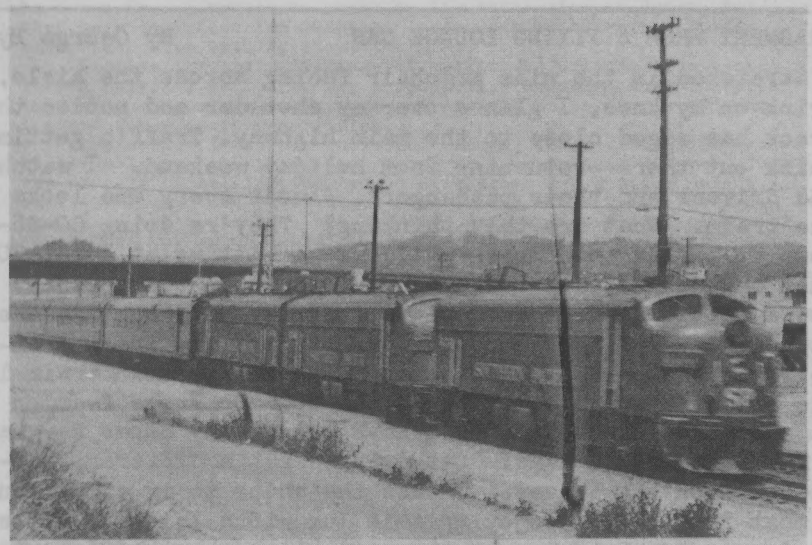

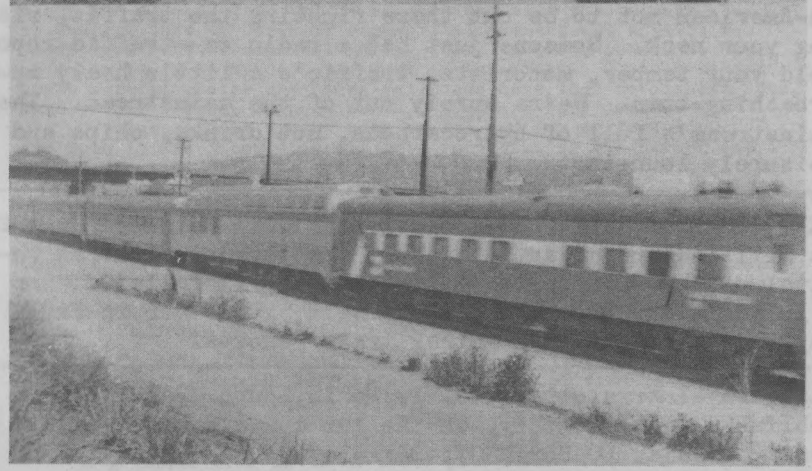

Paul Rayton Rides Mo Pac

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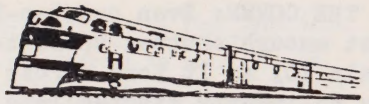

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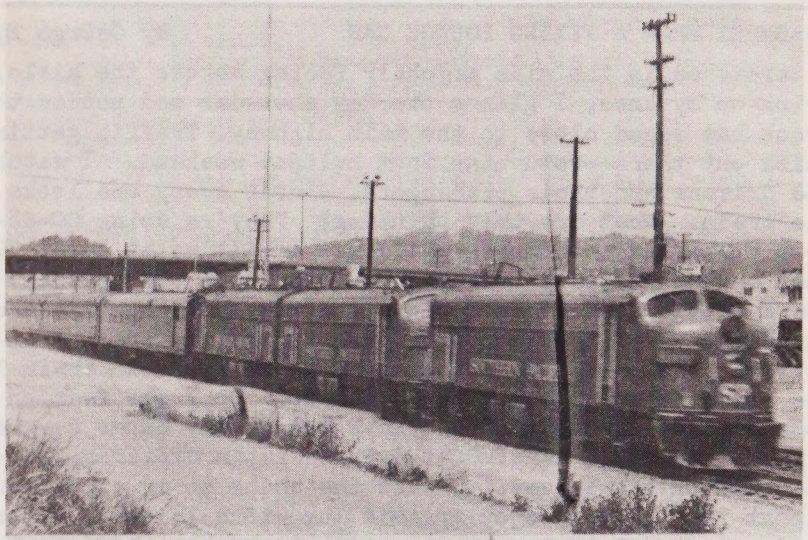

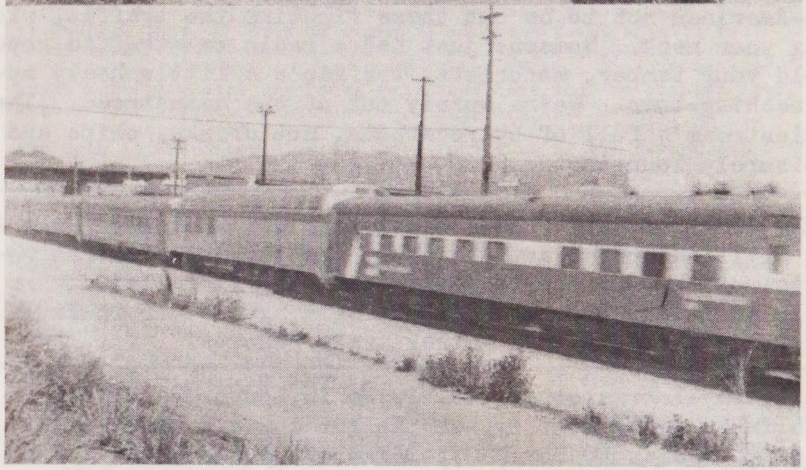

Paul Rayton Rides Mo Pac

ON THE COVER: Even one two-hundredth of a second was not a fast enough shutter speed to freeze the speeding Amtrak train 101 as it tore across Addison Street, Berkeley, on May 23, twenty minutes late to its Oakland destination. Two shots with our trusty Soligor 66 on Agfa black & white film reveal nearly all the consist--similar to that described by reader David Soderblom in a letter starting on the next page. We've been nearly deluged with letters--thus the expanded section this issue. The consensus of readers seems to be that Amtrak has most improved trains, but the ticketing system still leaves much to be desired.

FRAGMENT FROM A FLYING LOUNGE CAR By George Hyko

Stretched in the wide armchair facing across the aisle, drink on my knee, I glance over my shoulder and notice the track has edged close to the main highway. Traffic getting thick out there--returning from holiday weekend. I watch the drivers and their passengers. Almost every one looks at the train. What are they thinking? They're doing 60-65--most following too close--while we're hitting at least 70. Must be odd to see a train passing you from the freeway. Now a little knot of cars slows traffic, but we glide ahead steadily. Will they wonder enough to try the train themselves? What a weird look some have, strapped in their little boxes, eyes fixed on the pavement. Do I see fear on some of those faces? Should have brought my Super 8--what a film this would make! Let drivers get a different perspective on themselves. I pass the chips to my companion. Almost feel guilty enjoying this luxurious leisure. Almost un-American not to be out there fighting the traffic, risking your neck. Someone just had a radio on--traffic report: hold your temper, motorists, traffic's a little heavy approaching town. We're surely out of the mainstream. The mainstream's full of hydrocarbons, not drinks, chips and leisurely lounging.

NEXT ISSUE of Rail Travel Newsletter will be dated June 21. It will feature an article about the attempted Amtrak revival of the California Zephyr, and how it failed.

In addition, of course, there will be another in Paul Rayton's series of pre-Amtrak train reports.

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LETTERS

My purpose in writing is to compliment you on your fine work, and to describe a trip I made May 6 on the City of San Francisco from Oakland to Ogden, which may be of interest to your readers.

My permanent address is Novato, Calif. My reason for a Virginia address is that I was drafted into the Army. I now work in the Pentagon as a computer programmer. I took 3 weeks leave at the end of April to be in California in the Spring as well as for the inauguration of Amtrak. My plan was to drive back with my car, but that never came about due to an illness and a realization of what 3000 miles of road would mean. So I decided to try Amtrak to Ogden, transfer to the Rio Grande Zephyr to Denver, and fly from there to Washington.

With this in mind, I called Oakland information to get Amtrak's number, but they had none under that name. There was one under NRPC, but it was not in service when I called. A friend managed to get their number in San Francisco, which turned out to be Santa Fe. I wanted to check on the connection at Ogden, but they were convinced the D&RGW no longer ran that train. In any case, they knew nothing about it.

Despite the cost advantage of getting a furlough fare ticket (coach only), I wanted to try a roomette. However, they insisted they had no roomettes left, and not wishing to pay for a bedroom, I asked for a coach reservation.

Apparently I was not insistent enough, for a friend was eventually able to talk them into giving me a roomette. However, just the process of calling them would discourage any but the ardent rail traveler. The phone would ring 6 or 7 times before they answered. That's not bad, but the same lady answered each time, and would then put me on "hold" while she went to look up something. Thirty seconds later some guy came on, asking if he could help. I said I was already being helped, at which point he hung up! This happened twice! The second time I gave the lady my phone number, and she was nice enough to call back, tho much later.

Thus the reservation was made. The appointed morning, May 6, my father drove me to the Oakland depot (Editor's note: a distance of 30 miles). We arrived about 9:10am; the train leaves at 9:50. I got in line at the ticket window, about fourth in line. There was but one ticket window open, despite an abundance of personnel to man them. A lady at the front then proceeded to buy 5 or 6 full tickets, the agent carefully typing up each one. This took 25 minutes, after which time those in front of me had left, giving up all hope. I then bought my ticket about 20 minutes before train time. Since I had a very heavy foot locker with me, I wanted to check it at the baggage counter, but I was told the baggage agent had already gone to the baggage car with the baggage, i.e., it was too late to check my baggage. I pointed out that it was their fault that I couldn't get my ticket sooner, but to no avail. So I hauled it to my car, the last in the train. I would like to pause here to praise one thing railroads have that no airline does, namely self-service luggage carts, which are very useful.

Of course there was no room on the car for my foot locker, and both it and I couldn't fit in a roomette, so the porter and I argued about it. In the end he put it in an empty roomette, thus solving the problem.

By this point it all seemed like a labor of Hercules, but I found to my delight that once on board the trip was magnificent. Amtrak has of course eliminated many trains, and one benefit of this is that the best of the equipment is being used. Our train had a very colorful consist of a Milwaukee Road baggage (yellow), 3 UP coaches (yellow), one GN coach (Empire Builder green and orange), another GN coach (Big Sky Blue), the Lewis and Clark Traveler's Rest from the North Coast Limited (dark & light green), a BN diner ("Lake Michigan" in BN green), an SP dome lounge, a CB&Q Calif. Zephyr sleeper, an SP Sunset sleeper, and another CB&Q Zephyr sleeper. I was in the last car, one of its few occupants.

We had few operating problems, our main holdup being stuck behind a reefer drag until we could pass it at Emigrant Gap. The scenery was of course superb going over Donner Summit, and the timing of the train is perfect. I did overhear one couple complaining that the train left Oakland too early, but the early departure allows you to see more scenery in daylight than you could on the

old schedule. Arrival in Reno was at about 5pm, just in time for an evening there. Despite its being tri-weekly, it goes up on Saturdays and back on Sundays, so weekend trips to Reno work out eautifully.

Except for the conductor and brakemen, all the crew were from the UP, which of course was renowned for its service. Their reputation is well deserved, for these employees provided the finest rail service I have ever encountered. They were friendly and helpful despite a little inexperience with the different equipment. Everything was spotless and well-maintained. The diner had full linen, and a white and red carnation at each table. The linen and silver were from the UP. The menus were from the City of Los Angeles, and the prices were very reasonable. The hamburger I had for lunch was fresh and nicely grilled with fresh French fries. That was $1.75. The most expensive dinner was steak at $5.50, which was excellent. I did not try out the Traveler's Rest, a coffee shop car, but it was very attractive, and had BN menus.

One interesting thing was the Amtrak representative on board. He went with the conductor as he collected tickets, but said little, and seemed to me not to be worth his cost, although it is a nice idea.

The single most impressive thing to me was that we stuck right to the schedule to the minute all the way to Ogden. Personally, I can't stand late trains, so I was very pleased with this, tho it may have been due in part to some slack in the schedule. Nevertheless, I was very impressed by that close timing.

After arriving in Ogden at 4am, I waited 3½ hours for the Rio Grande train, which turned out to be but a ghost of its former glories, but that's another story. I did want to share with you this information because I feel that at least the City of San Francisco is an excellent train and should be patronized. Ask your readers to try the weekend trip to Reno.

David R. Soderblom

Ft. Myer, Va.

(The Hackensack, N.J., Record carried a news item May 21 about Vincent Russo, an elementary school principal in Closter, N.J. who planned to take an 8th-grade class to visit the Capitol in Washington, and received a call from President Nixon about the trip. To quote the portion of the article of interest to railfans: "Russo said the students will make the trip June 3 and 4. They planned to go by train for the first time, but will have to use buses, Russo said, because Amtrak could not guarantee suitable return transportation."

When Mr. Frank C. Barry, Eastern Manager of Passenger Train Journal, learned of this, he wrote Russo a letter with copies to NRPC, NARP, several public officials, and kindly to RTN. We are printing his letter below:)

...Frankly, I was rather surprised that the students of the eighth-grade class at Village School were planning to travel by train, for the first time, during the annual two-day visit to Washington.

In my opinion, modern train travel in America should be considered by the people virtually as indispensable as the very air we breathe. Unfortunately, this has not been the case, with the result that the role of the passenger train in the daily movement of tens of millions of Americans has continued to dwindle.

Alternatively, the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, Amtrak, is supposed to arrest this decline and to create a new and vastly enlarged opportunity for the resurgence of intercity railway transportation.

On this basis, I can but express keen disappointment in reading that your students "will have to use buses, Russo said, because Amtrak could not guarantee suitable return transportation."

Hopefully, by this time next year, travel accomodations for Amtrak's New York to Washington corridor will be ample for the needs of the Village School to guarantee round-trip reservations for the eighth-grade class annual visit to the nation's Capitol.

If positive, constructive steps are not taken now to orient the next generation to the inherent efficiency and basic economy of high-speed surface mass transportation, the full potential of passenger train travel may have largely been sacrificed on the altar of free-enterprise lethargy and accompanying government indifference and apathy. ...

Frank C. Barry

Harrington Park, N.J.

RTN no. 12 was the first issue of your newsletter I've read and I enjoyed it very much.

As you may or may not already know, a New York-Chicago run via Cleveland, Buffalo and Toledo was inaugurated May 10. In addition, a Detroit-Toledo spur was supposed to go into effect June 1. The run is being subsidized by the various states along the route and is being operated on a six-month trial basis, depending on the passage of the subsidies by the respective state legislatures.

Continue the good work.

William H. Snorkland

Ft. Ord, Calif.

I have some observations at the end of a cross-country Amtrak journey the last week in May which you may find of interest.

In brief, my observations are that Amtrak is doing a commendable if stopgap job trainside, but the scene is one of total disarray and confusion behind the ticket counters of the nation.

On my return trip I heard numerous stories of how the narrator had to fight to get a reservation, was given consistently wrong information, and in one case had to go thru a Congressman to secure a ticket!

My case was not unique. Eastbound I noticed that the Chicago-N.Y. Broadway Ltd. carried a Sleepercoach (or Slumbercoach) from the old New York Central run. Having ridden the B&O Capitol Ltd. in the old days, I knew that the Slumbercoach provided a single or double room at coach fare plus $7 (single).

But the ticket agent had not mentioned it when I made my reservation for coach at Minneapolis. I decided to go Sleepercoach on the return west, so I made my reservations by phone to the PC 30th St. Station in Philadelphia. The agent told me he'd have to contact Chicago about my reservations from there west, so he'd call me back the next day. When the call came, the woman reading me the information stopped when she got to the Sleepercoach space. "I'm sorry, sir, they made the reservation in a single roomette. I'll change it and call you back with the proper reservation."

About half an hour later I got the call. I had a single Sleepercoach room. But she couldn't tell me the price of the ticket, so I had to call back. A guy answered the phone talking out of the side of his mouth. "We don't have a Sleepercoach to Chicago," he declared when I tried to tell him the facts.

"You do have a Sleepercoach," I corrected him. "I have a reservation on it," and proceeded to read him the space and car number. He went away to check and came back admitting grumpily that I was correct. He quoted me a fare of $135 total. I pointed out that I had been given a fare of $139.50 for coach alone when I had inquired at Oakland. With a $7 Sleepercoach charge that would be $146.50. He said that "their tariffs are different from ours" and assured me that $135 would be all I'd need.

So I went down to 30th St. with a cashier's check for that amount. It took some convincing before the clerk there would believe that I had reservations, and for almost 15 minutes she scribbled, checked with supervisors and did other mysterious things which greatly interested the line of people that had collected behind me.

Halfway through she looked up and said "that will be $145.50." To my protestations that I'd been quoted a lower figure she answered that there was an "extra fare" on the SP and a seat reservation charge for the Chicago-Cakland run. Fortunately I could produce the difference in cash, and after checking to see whether the Penn Central would accept a cashier's check drawn on the bank that owned most of their rolling stock, she completed her duties.

On the Broadway Ltd. I found that the coaches were fairly full and the Sleepercoach was at best half full. This might be attributable to the fact that this service is mentioned in only one line in the timetable PC puts out. No supplementary notice or anything. It must indeed by a savvy traveler who knows to ask for it, especially considering the expertise of the ticket agents.

On the "California Zephyr" (Chicago-Denver) the seats in my coach had been reversed, with two bad effects: 1) the reading lights shone directly into our eyes, and 2) two groups of four facing seats were created, none of which have leg rests. I assumed these were reserved for families with small children, but found they were being treated just like any other seat!

To make matters worse, there were leg rests built into the bulkhead of the coach to serve the front seats had they been turned the right way. Seven people had to endure a night's "sleep" worthy of the worst of railroad folklore on this trip. I'd like to hear the rationalization Amtrak uses for this breach of faith, but I'm not going to try just now, since the chances are that the Amtrak executives (if there are any) have their hands full just holding on to the tiger's tail.

I am more of a spectator than an investigator, but I collected an incredible number of complaints about the ticket and reservation "system" on this trip. Amtrak phone numbers are not listed in any city, it appears, clerks consistently quote the wrong prices, don't know which cities are served by Amtrak, and keep long-distance callers waiting for minutes on end.

One fellow Zephyr passenger noted that those hardy souls riding the train were the survivors of the reservation process. "Who knows how many just gave up?" he mused. If it's one, that's one too many.

Contrasted to this performance is the trainside service, which I found summed up by an incident in the wilds of Wyoming.

Our 3-unit power consist was stopped by some unidentified trouble, probably in the controls. We were pushed off the main onto a siding by a freight behind us, and lost about 2 hours. The next freight that passed us (coming from the opposite direction) stopped, unhitched one of its "Centennial" units (UP 5005) which coupled onto our head end and pulled us into Green River at full speed. The control defect was fixed there, and we'd made up an hour by Ogden. We arrived in Oakland only 5 min. late.

Would the UP have dared to slow down that freight in the old days? Or would power have been scraped up and sent out from Green River at leisure, and the time never made up? Score one for Amtrak.

Lee Felsenstein

Berkeley, Calif.

COMMUTING AND RAPID TRANSIT

(A conference on public transportation was held June 1-2 in Washington D.C., sponsored by the Conservation Foundation and the National Urban Coalition. At that meeting, Joseph Vranich, Executive Director of the National Association of Railroad Passengers, gave a talk entitled "The Commuter--A Plea for Action Now." The talk is printed in its entirety below.)

As executive director of the National Association of Railroad Passengers I am constantly receiving mail from commuters telling me of their woes and anguish. These correspondents usually look to our Association for a solution to their problems and, when possible, we try to be helpful.

But no matter what I do for a living, transportation is a highly personal thing to me. For example, on November 30 I moved to the Washington area and resided temporarily in Alexandria, Virginia. Within three months I was so disgusted with the daily trip over the 14th Street bridge that I moved into Southwest Washington and now walk to work on Capitol Hill. So, during my brief tenure with this national transportation consumers' organization I have solved the commuter problem for one person, at least.

The nation, however, is filled with people who cannot or will not move into a city to avoid commuting. Consequently, we have the Long Island expressway being called a parking lot since jammed traffic is so often at a standstill. We have motorists on the Los Angeles freeways finding themselves completely immobile due to congestion at nine o'clock at night. Yet the highway builders insist that these situations can be circumvented only by constructing more highways! This, in turn, has sparked strong, vocal and powerful public opposition to urban highway construction.

continued on page 11

AMTRAK'S TRIUMPHS AND TROUBLES

As the first month of operation of Amtrak trains was completed, reports rolled in of how the service was going. By and large things were running relatively smoothly. Trains were mainly running on time--this seemed due to Amtrak's requirement that passenger trains not be sidetracked for freight, as well as the slack in some schedules due to the elimination of many passenger stops without tightening schedules accordingly.

There were scattered reports of the usual mishaps. The Cascade was delayed over 3 hours May 29 north of Klamath Falls, Oregon, when the fireman was reportedly struck by a flying bird. The northbound train halted until a new fireman could be found. Then north of Salem the same train was involved in an accident with a truck.

There has been a good deal of praise for the improved consists of long-haul trains such as the City of San Francisco. The latter reportedly has lately been carrying 4 sleepers, and runs 70-80% filled. (Between Chicago and Denver the train joins with the daily Denver Zephyr, carrying Zephyr domes, making about 18 cars with duplicate diners and lounges--one of the nation's most interesting consists.)

added service

Amtrak would not confirm the report for RTN, but it seems likely another train to serve southern parts of Montana and North Dakota will be added June 15, for a 15-month trial period of tri-weekly service. It would run between Spokane and Fargo, over the route of the former North Coast Limited, presumably connecting with the daily Empire Builder at either end of its run. Amtrak said it's to serve Yellowstone Park, but the Wall Street Journal (June 4) hinted it was being put on to appease Senate critic Mike Mansfield.

A New York-Chicago train through Cleveland was added May 10. The train leaves N.Y. at 8:30 pm, takes 12 hours to Cleveland, and reaches Chicago at 2:15pm. Eastbound it gets out of Chicago at 1:50pm, Cleveland 9:25pm, New York 9:30am.

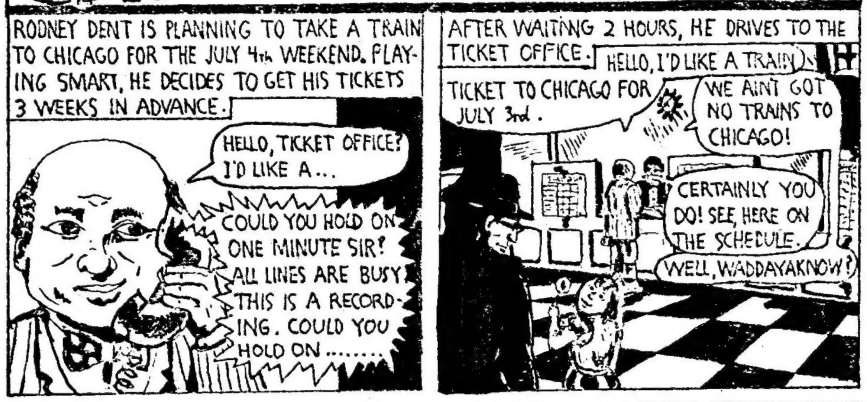
criticism

The sooner Amtrak gets its computerized reservation system going, the better, judging from many strong reactions to the confusion reported in trying to get tickets (see letters from readers elsewhere in this issue). Western Airlines late in May formally requested Amtrak to initiate combined air-rail vacation packages that could be purchased either through Amtrak or the airline. Western has since 1966 had such an arrangement with Burlington Northern and Canadian National.

West Coast critics are charging that Amtrak has downgraded the Coast Daylight by not running dome lounge

(continued on page 10)

CAPTAIN AMTRACK



CAPTAIN AMTRACK

RODNEY DENT IS PLANNING TO TAKE A TRAIN TO CHICAGO FOR THE JULY 4th WEEKEND. PLAYING SMART, HE DECIDES TO GET HIS TICKETS 3 WEEKS IN ADVANCE.

HELLO, TICKET OFFICE? I'D LIKE A...

COULD YOU HOLD ON ONE MINUTE SIR! ALL LINES ARE BUSY! THIS IS A RECORDING. COULD YOU HOLD ON.....

AFTER WAITING 2 HOURS, HE DRIVES TO THE TICKET OFFICE.

HELLO, I'D LIKE A TRAIN TICKET TO CHICAGO FOR JULY 3rd.

WE AIN'T GOT NO TRAINS TO CHICAGO!

CERTAINLY YOU DO! SEE, HERE ON THE SCHEDULE.

WELL, WADDAYAKNOW?

WELL COULD I HAVE THE TICKETS? I GOTTA CONFOIM DIS SCHEDULE. WHY DONCHA COME BACK IN 2 DAYS?

TWO DAYS LATER-

HELLO! MY NAME IS RODNEY DENT, I...

YEAH, I REMEMBER YOU. I'LL PUT YOU DOWN FOR A RESERVATION BUT YOU GOTTA COME BACK AND PICK UP YER TICKETS.

THREE DAYS LATER-

HELLO! I'M HERE TO PICK UP MY TICKETS.

WHAT'S YER NAME?

RODNEY DENT.

THERE'S NO DENT HERE, ON THIS RESERVATION LIST.

ONE WEEK LATER-

HERE'S YER TICKET, DENT. DETROIT ON THE 3rd!

?

ANOTHER WEEK PASSES AND STILL NO TICKET TO CHICAGO!

I CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE!

POOR RODNEY'S MIND HAS SNAPPED!!!

HIS MIND STRAINED BEYOND THE BREAKING POINT, HE DECIDES TO STEAL THE TICKET!

HEH, HEH, HEH

CAPTAIN AMTRACK, ON PATROL, SEES A LIGHT ON IN THE TICKET OFFICE!

THAT'S ODD! NO ONE SHOULD BE IN THERE NOW.

HE BURSTS IN!

THE SHOCK OF SEEING CAPTAIN AMTRACK RETURNS RODNEY'S MIND TO NORMAL.

I'M SORRY, CAPTAIN AMTRACK. I DON'T KNOW WHAT CAME OVER ME! I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A GOOD BOY. YOU SEE, I JUST WANTED A TICKET.....

AND HE TELLS THE CAPTAIN THE WHOLE STORY...

THE NEXT DAY-

ULP! CAPTAIN AMTRACK!

GIVE THIS MAN HIS TICKET TO CHICAGO!

SURE, SURE-N-NO PROBLEM!

AND SO, JUSTICE TRIUMPHS ONCE AGAIN!

THE END

(continued from page 7)

cars on holidays, and by continuing the much-maligned automatic buffet cars. However, SP spokesmen indicated the automats will be dropped about mid-June, and a diner-grill substituted. Amtrak, questioned in Washington about the domes, pleaded ignorance. SP owns only 5 domes, and most are in use on the City of S.F. Massive shifting of cars between railroads apparently cannot come before Aug. 1, when Amtrak will have settled its car purchase or lease arrangements with individual roads.

The dome seen southbound on the Daylight on Memorial Day was deadheaded to Los Angeles. On June 1 it returned to Oakland while Universal Studios filmed part of a movie, "Open Shadow" aboard it between L.A. and Salinas, Calif.

private R.R. cars

Amtrak had promised to handle private cars on its trains until Aug. 1, provided they were handled in cities where switching them did not interfere with schedules. Beyond Aug. 1 the service is now in doubt, and Amtrak has not yet announced what its policy will be.

trains get rocked

Now that Amtrak runs passenger trains between Oakland and San Jose, youngsters along that route have taken to hurling rocks at the passing cars. One lady reportedly was injured last month, and SP is routinely drawing shades in the danger areas, while company police try to trace the offenders, though apparently so far to no avail. About half the trains over the route collect broken windows.

TRAVEL TRAGEDIES

A Hughes Air West jetliner flying from Los Angeles to Salt Lake City collided with a Marine fighter shortly after takeoff June 6, killing 50 people. It was the first U.S. scheduled airline crash in over a year, and the worst civilian plane crash in California history. Train service over the route was discontinued by Amtrak on May 1.

The next day, an Allegheny Airlines plane from Washington D.C. crashed near New Haven, Conn., killing 28 of 31 aboard.

Two European train disasters occurred in one week. On May 27, 40 school children and 5 adults were killed and 24 hurt in a rail diesel car collision in West Germany, making it that country's worst train wreck in history. On May 30 in a suburb of Amsterdam 5 were killed and 35 injured when a French Luxembourg-Amsterdam train, halted at a red signal, was struck from behind by a Dutch train, a Maastricht-Amsterdam express.

(continued from page 6)

Every major city needs to place greater emphasis on mass public transportation by bus, rapid rail systems, and commuter railroads--systems which will preserve the already low levels of sanity of our commuters. Our political leaders and technocrats must offer immediate relief from traffic congestion. In other words, we should not allow consideration of esoteric systems--such as tracked air cushion vehicles--to be an excuse for not taking action to improve conventional rail and bus transit. The exotic system may not be ready for another 10 years. The frustrated commuter doesn't want an improved system when he's old and retired. He wants one tomorrow morning when he has to face his steering wheel again.

We must begin now to use what is available today. For example, we should rebuild and revitalize our commuter railroad systems where track already exists. We should build busways where land is already available on median strips of highways. And a greater number of cities have to get down to the serious task of designing a proven type of mass transit system where a demonstrated need exists.

People will ride trains and buses when the systems are clean, have a reasonable frequency of service, on-time performance and moderate fares. In Philadelphia, for example, a beefed-up rail commuter network has caused ridership to jump 40% in the past decade--and that's with old cars and old stations. One railroad in Chicago modernized its system completely and scored a 34% increase in ridership in 1970 over 1961, despite multi-million dollar expressways paralleling much of the system.

Transit planners should take pains to meet with citizens and commuters before developing their proposals. Otherwise they may engender public opposition which will inevitably delay transit improvements. A fine example is the situation in Pittsburgh. There, the local transit authority plans to rip up existing main-line, heavy-duty railroad tracks and pave the right-of-way for a busway. This has sparked a tremendous amount of criticism from citizens' groups which are genuinely pro-transit. The Pittsburgh case illustrates the hazards of insistence by planners and politicians on something that's "different," which overlooks the practical realities of getting me and you to work by nine a.m., or getting a city dweller out to suburbia where a good percentage of the new jobs are opening.

Transit systems do not have to operate 300 mph vehicles or be excessively glamorous in order to be functional to the person who needs transportation. The average citizen or commuter should inspect his city's transit proposal and ask 3 basic questions:

1. Do the routes proposed go to the sections of the city which most need improved public transit, such as low-income neighborhoods or traffic-snarled areas?
2. Is a relatively proven system being promoted which will enable the city to proceed with construction in a short period of time?
3. Do the officials of the transit authority conduct their affairs in an above-the-board manner and are they willing to cooperate with the public in exploring ways of improving or modifying their plan?

If the answer to any of those questions is "no," then that city is headed for a transit controversy which may cause a bond issue to be defeated, may jeopardize a capital grant application with the Department of Transportation, and may delay transit improvements a considerable length of time.

Transit improvements must not be delayed because the average commuter is in a rather depressed frame of mind. His daily trip takes him longer and costs him more money each year. Home-to-work travel is a continual source of personal aggravation. Meanwhile, his automobile is destroying the air and is causing mal-appropriation of valuable urban land.

Commuters do not have to be forced aboard a public transit vehicle. They will voluntarily board buses and trains if the right combination of service and fares is offered. The best thing about transit systems is that we already know how to build them--what's needed is not technological breakthroughs but political ones. Until those political breakthroughs come along, commuters will continue to be captive to their automobiles. And they--as well as their surrounding environment--will suffer enormously.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK ***

"...the Senate quickly passed a resolution calling for a study to be done by Amtrak on ways and means for increasing the number of intercity rail-passenger trains. Now that same resolution sits in the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee, awaiting action.

...those who are convinced that the future of American transport lies in expanding, rather than shrinking, rail passenger service, will do well to so advise their congressional representatives.

Once the ardor for spending additional tax revenues on any project cools down, the job of building up a new head of steam under the congressional boilers is not easy."

--Christian Science Monitor editorial, June 1

"The simplest cure for automobilitis in the cities, then, is to bust the Highway Trust and to release its monies on a fair, competitive footing for whatever means of conveyance proves most adaptable to human sensitivities.

Can the Highway Trust be busted? I believe that it can be. Furthermore, I am convinced that it will be when enough people understand how the Highway Trust is wrecking America, not only esthetically but economically and spiritually."

--Denis Hayes in Saturday Review, June 5

EDITORIAL: REMEMBER WHEN TRAVEL WAS FUN?

One needn't be very old to recall the days when it was enjoyable, rather than nerve-wracking, to travel in the U.S. What's happened to us? Something has gotten out of balance. One segment of our transportation system has grown like a cancer to the detriment of all else and itself besides. The automobile, spawned by the Highway Trust Fund that pours ever-increasing rivers of concrete over our precious land, is clearly out of hand. Auto and highway construction have gotten into what the cybernetics call a positive-feedback loop--a vicious circle. Balance must be restored to our out-of-hand transportation facilities. An obvious place to begin is with rail transport. Every advanced nation but our own has modern, workable rail transportation. We have the most meager of systems--hardly a system at all--for supposedly the world's most powerful nation. Our task is to divert funds from the fat cats of the powerful highway lobby and put them elsewhere, where they can get our travel facilities back into balance. If we don't succeed in doing that, no one will be able to travel in comfort. The nation will become one huge traffic jam of automobiles, and every other mode of transport will wither and die.

KEEPING TRACK

...with Paul Rayton

(A regular RTN feature. Each issue presents another review-critique of a selected pre-Amtrak train.)

MISSOURI RIVER EAGLE

Date: Thursday, December 17, 1970

I had heard such bad stories about the Missouri Pacific and its "anti-passenger" sentiments that I was a little apprehensive when we boarded the MISSOURI RIVER EAGLE in Kansas City, Mo. for a trip to St. Louis. Even the redcap in Union Station sounded slightly incredulous when I asked him if this was a reserved seat train. "Are you kidding?" he replied. "What's the food like on here? Is there anything worth eating?" I asked him next. "Well, I've heard that they have a hamburger on there that must have half a pound of meat in it which is supposed to be pretty good." I thanked him for the information and we boarded, ready for anything.

The trains of "MoPac" are all painted a dark blue, a shade somewhere between Great Northern sky blue and the blue Pullman "Quiet" signs. The exterior appearance of these blue trains (the engines match the cars) is quite nice. This blue is an attractive color for a train: it provides good visual identification; the color is austere and quiet, suggesting that a restful ride will be found on the train; and besides, it doesn't show off too conspicuously the dust it accumulates en route.

There were three cars in the consist. The first was a "Grill Coach." Next was a standard day coach with no remarkable features. The third car was also a coach, but one with traces of history. (There was also one deadhead coach in front of the Grill Coach.) Since we were "through" passengers, the conductor placed us in the Grill Coach. This car turned out to be built into three sections: 1/3 coach seats, 1/3 dining area, and 1/3 kitchen area. A wall separated coach seats from dining space. The coach seats were "standard": they reclined, but they were close together like any day coach, and there were none of the big, luxurious leg rests some western railroads offer. In other words, this was not an old luxury car from the AZTEC EAGLE days. Forward, through a porthole-like window in the barren, swinging door, we could see the dining area.

The last car in the train, like the second car a full-length coach, still showed traces of perhaps some former glory of thru service to Mexico once operated upon this line. The seats seemed a little more plush, the colors and interior woodwork bore a suggestion of Mexican influence, and the rear quarter of the car was set off by a wrought iron, Aztec-motif divider. My guess was that the ironwork originally served to separate smoking and non-smoking sections. This was not a regularly used car, I decided.

We left Kansas City right on time (there went one of the "bad" preconceptions) at 11:30am. The ride out from Kansas City was rather dreary for about 30 minutes; drab industrial yards are no ocular feast. Slowly we moved out to the suburbs, and then found ourselves among the Missouri farm lands.

At Mt. Pleasant, a flag stop, I saw a sign on the station's "arrivals and departures" board to the effect that "Standing on the platform will be the signal for train to stop."

And then a surprising aspect of our day's trip became apparent: we had a <u>really</u> good roadbed. Of course, we weren't rolling along at 90 mph, but at the conservative speeds we did travel (circa 65) the roadbed was really smooth. And smooth roadbed, aside from being a rarity, is really a pleasure to ride upon, especially if you are expecting the worst, or accustomed to wretched-riding commuter cars. (I suspect that commuter cars are one of the reasons people don't ride trains anymore--I've ridden in some that would have been more comfortable if equipped with square wheels to be run along the ties.) I would have to grade the MoPac roadbed, overall, an A-.

The wintry landscape was kissed by sunlight; a clear blue sky contrasted with the brownish yellow of the sleeping fields.

Missouri topography was another surprise. I had made this same trip by auto on the Interstate Highway a year earlier, and my recollections of the trip are feelings of "what a long, dull ride this is" and how I kept needing to buy gas. Today, on the train, I suddenly noticed that Missouri was really pretty, especially the rolling hills spotted with farmhouses and little patches of snow.

Before long, we decided to venture into the dining area and try the food. We passed through the swinging door and looked over the situation. There were six tables, three on either side, with a seating capacity of 24. The tables' formica tops were set with paper placemats and paper napkins. From floor to ceiling I could find no evidence of any effort at interior decorating, which meant a fairly stark appearance. (My guess is that this was originally a full-length dining car with the full complement of 12 tables. An economy move replaced half the tables with seats to make it both a "revenue" and "non-revenue" car.

Two tables were unoccupied, the two farthest from the kitchen, so we sat down at one of these. Well, then things started to go downhill. After we'd waited, apparently invisible, for several minutes, I began to think we might not get served. Ahhh! At last, attention. The waiter came over and I expected to be presented with a menu. "Do you see any menus there?" he sneered. "If you wanna get any food, you have to sit at the other tables." I tried to ask him why he was unable to serve at the table at which we were seated--after all, it was only two steps farther away from the kitchen than the next tables. No use; he was intractable. As a matter of fact, he wouldn't even listen to my question, let alone answer it. So we, having been served our humble pie for an appetizer, moved forward to an "approved" table. Now we were eligible for food service--but that did not necessarily mean prompt food service.

I don't know what was wrong with the man; there was no rationale for his behavior. There was certainly no provocation on the part of anybody in the dining car--he treated everybody else with equal disdain. Even slow service isn't so bad--I like eating at a leisurely pace. But the bad taste of thoughtless service cannot be overcome by even the most sumptuous of feasts. It became almost funny. Anytime more people came in, they would invariably sit at the empty (but verboten) tables. It was then only a matter of time before the conversation/confrontation, which led either to the people moving forward to some other (usually occupied) table, or moving back to the coach section, nodding their heads in disbelief or incomprehension. The funny part (and not so funny, really, for here embodied was another reason people don't care to ride trains) was that we knew the clash was inevitable; what form would it take?

Eventually I gathered that all this was brought about by his desire to keep those other two tables available for beverage-only service. So why didn't he say so civilly in the first place?

Other than coping with the waiter, the lunch was rather enjoyable. There were several vestiges of the old, first class EAGLES that MoPac used to run: some of the plates and silver had the "Eagle" logo. Large silver water decanters were on the table --dented from years of use--, but on them also the "Eagle" logo was still visible. I don't delude myself that these EAGLE artifacts remained out of any sentimental feelings from the Executive Board of the Missouri Pacific--it's just cheaper to use things until they fall apart than to buy new ones.

My wife ordered the "Grilled Hamburger on Toasted Bun" ($1.45) and I opted for the "Old Fashioned Beef Stew en Casserole" for $1.75. For a hamburger, you might think $1.45 a little steep, but it was undoubtedly the largest hamburger I have ever seen commercially served! The meat hung out over the edges of the bun all the way around, and in addition it was deliciously thick. To top it off, it was good meat, broiled expertly to a tender, tasty mouth-pleaser. I have seen hamburgers prepared on many railroads, but MoPac's hamburger "is worth the price of admission alone." This hamburger even made it fun to ride in the

diner. It was great to watch people's faces express surprise when they saw the size of the burger placed before them. ("Oh my, Mildred! Look at this!") My beef stew was obviously from a can. A quarter-head of lettuce with dressing and bread and butter rounded out my lunch. The lettuce was reasonably fresh, but the French dressing was too bland, too much mayonnaise for my tastes. Dessert and drink (C, T, or M) are included. For dessert there was only sliced peaches, also obviously from a can.

There was only one other hot entree on the menu, Chicken a la King on toast points ($1.65). Ham and/or cheese sandwiches were available for about $1. There was a separate beverage list, with most drinks $1.25-$1.50. There were even a few wines (port, claret, sherry, sauterne), and beer sold for 60¢.

I paused and reflected over my after-dinner tea. While reflecting, I noticed that they were serving "Old Judge" brand tea bags. Odd! I thought. Poor old Missouri Pacific--they were in bankruptcy so long, and had so many dealings through the courts--well, even now the specter of the Judiciary hangs over them...

At Jefferson City, Mo., the approximate mid-point of the trip, we were right on time and had about a 3-minute station stop. Here is an architecturally interesting station. It is true to the Jeffersonian style and--surprise--it is really well cared for inside. White slat shutters border the windows, and the layout generally suggests Monticello.

Oooops! Almost got left behind! Three minutes is a short stop. Now that most everybody has been served lunch, the waiter seemed to soften a bit in his attitude. He had even (miraculously) allowed us to sit at his rearmost table--from which we previously had been evicted--to better view the scenery. Since these windows were the cleanest and largest to be found on the train, we sat there for the better sightseeing conditions. Even though our actual coach seats were only some 15 feet to the rear (and in the same car yet) the windows there inexplicably were much grubbier.

From our tableside seats we had seen our approach to the mighty Missouri River. In fact, eastward from Jefferson City we paralleled the river for some 80 miles, mostly all directly along the south bank. And still I was impressed by the smoothness of the ride.

While sitting at the table for scenery, we also heard various crew members discussing life on MoPac. One man said that the coach batteries were either old or run down and that they'd never function properly during the forthcoming Christmas vacation peak period. And the chef and waiter discussed how, on their last trip, they had to wait in the station for two hours because the engine crew couldn't get the steam generator working. They didn't want to send out a train with no heat in mid-December. That sounded logical. But was that incident also attributable to the reputed "anti-passenger" bias I had heard of?

Near Washington, Mo. there are several large natural caves. We passed just yards from the huge gaping holes hollowed in the walls of cliffs. Did Tom Sawyer once play in these hills? MoPac used to run dome cars along this route; it must have been a stunning ride back then.

Arrival in St. Louis was 10 minutes late; we stepped down at 5:20pm. The logical connection for us (traveling on eastward toward Pennsylvania) had left at 5:00pm--just 10 minutes prior to MoPac's scheduled arrival. That skillful scheduling meant a night in a hotel in St. Louis. Who planned the schedules to disconnect this way?

Despite the bad time we'd had with the waiter on the EAGLE, we had a pleasant journey. There were enough factors that were "pleasant" or "adequate" to offset the difficulties. I am sure, also, that not every employee is of like demeanor. So much of these personality problems, when they happen, are the result of individuals and not company policy. But this is not to say that the company is blameless. There should be a personnel department charged with monitoring and improving employee attitudes. This man's slide down to disgraceful, snide unpleasantness should not have been tolerated.

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